

Sunnydown School

Portley House, 152 Whyteleafe Road, Caterham, Surrey CR3 5ED

Inspection dates 12–13 July 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Prior to the arrival of the headteacher in September 2014, a decline in standards had gone unnoticed because of a lack of transparency in the work of leaders at that time. Since then, the headteacher has successfully changed the culture of the school, which is now open, ambitious and collaborative. Consequently, the decline has been reversed and the school is now good.
- Governors carry out their roles effectively by asking challenging questions of the headteacher and other leaders. They check what they are told by visiting the school.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are effective in their roles. They ensure the majority of lessons are interesting, well organised, calm and purposeful so pupils can learn.
- Pupils achieve well, both academically and personally. During their time at the school, almost all boys develop effective skills in reading, writing, mathematics and communication.
- Leaders and staff encourage pupils to share their opinions. Pupils are consulted on many aspects of school life (although they would like more).
- Pupils successfully work towards a range of GCSE subjects and are supported well, so many achieve qualifications which will support their future independence.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are promoted extremely well. Pupils develop effective social and emotional understanding. They become increasingly aware of their feelings and how to manage them.
- Behaviour is almost always good and often better.
- Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education. They undertake work experience and are encouraged to be increasingly independent. Pupils are made aware of colleges and schools with specific courses and subjects to meet their areas of interest.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, many of which are organised in response to pupils' requests.
- Staff at the school make sure pupils are safe. They know their responsibilities and take an individualised approach to ensure pupils are cared for and happy.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is some variability in how well teachers meet pupils' needs. In some lessons, work is not set at the right level to help pupils learn as much as they could. The curriculum does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to excel in areas other than the eight subjects all pupils learn.
- Recently appointed middle leaders are not as effective as they could be.
- Information about pupils' learning is not presented and analysed in a way that helps leaders be clear about which groups are doing well, or enables governors to hold leaders fully to account.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is too high due to a small number of pupils who demonstrate poor behaviour. Although exclusions are reducing, there is more to do.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils make the same strong progress in all lessons and subjects by:
 - making sure that teachers consistently plan activities at the right level to meet pupils' needs
 - developing the skills of weaker teachers so that they provide a calm and purposeful learning environment.

- Embed improvements in leadership and management by:
 - further enriching the curriculum so that pupils' needs are met more fully
 - continuing to develop the middle leaders in their roles so that they can fully support the school's improvement
 - refining achievement information about pupils' progress, both personal and academic, so that it helps leaders to identify priorities for improvement and enables governors to hold leaders fully to account
 - further reducing fixed-term exclusions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The current headteacher joined Sunnydown just less than two years ago. He accurately identified that, although well concealed, there were deep-rooted issues which meant that the school no longer met pupils' needs as well as it could. He has worked tirelessly to build a culture of honesty and openness with all staff so that nothing is hidden and staff feel confident that the concerns they raise will be listened to and acted upon. As a result, the school is now improving. It is already much more effective at providing a safe and happy learning environment for the boys than at the time the headteacher joined the school.
- Leaders, teachers, support staff and governors speak overwhelmingly positively about the improvements the headteacher has brought about in consistency of approach, high standards, communication and rigour. Staff are wholeheartedly signed up to his vision and are just as committed as he is for the school to be the very best it can.
- Recent changes to the leadership structure are helping to embed much-needed consistency in teaching, expectations and management of behaviour. Coaching and mentoring support, provided by the headteacher, have enabled senior leaders to help drive improvements. The newly appointed middle leaders are benefiting from the same approach, although they are still developing their roles and skills.
- Staff receive useful training, linked to their specific responsibilities, so they feel empowered to carry out their roles. In the Ofsted survey, staff responded that this is a particular strength. Targets to improve performance are relevant but are not quite as sharply linked to the school improvement plan as they could be.
- The headteacher involves all leaders and governors in identifying the priorities for school improvement. Each area for improvement is led by a governor and a senior leader so that the responsibility for improvement is shared effectively. This has brought about improvements in several areas, including better outcomes for pupils and increased site security.
- Leaders' checks on teaching are timely and accurate. When new teachers join the school, leaders monitor their work carefully so they can be sure how effective they are. Senior leaders know the specific strengths and areas for improvement of each teacher. They give useful feedback, and when support is required, it is provided. This has brought about improvements in teaching in all subjects. However, leaders rightly identify that there is more to do to ensure all teachers have the same high-quality skills as the best.
- Pupils' progress, both personal and academic, is checked carefully. The new assessment system for identifying progress in personal skills is well designed to track how pupils are doing in each area and demonstrates some of the good and very good progress being made in the non-academic skills. However, the analysis and presentation of this information is not clear enough to help leaders identify sufficiently well where progress is not as good as it could be. This means that it does not help them identify exactly where improvements can be made. Similarly, governors do not have a clear picture from the information they are given and, consequently, are not able to hold leaders fully to account.
- Currently, all pupils work towards the same eight GCSE qualifications. There is a choice of pathways for those who are more or less academically minded. Leaders rightly recognise that this places limitations on how successful some pupils can be and are in the process of broadening the opportunities available. The recently acquired grant to set up a bike workshop is a good example of the way leaders are seeking to include more practical activities to meet the needs of less academic pupils.
- Leaders and staff are very responsive to any requests pupils make for extra-curricular activities. As a result, the school offers a wide range of clubs and opportunities for pupils to explore their areas of interest. These include fishing, golf and geocaching. Where pupils are particularly interested in, or good at, an activity, leaders support them to participate as much as possible.
- The school places a high priority on the development of pupils' personal, social and health development. In addition to the planned lessons, it is woven through other subjects, such as English and art. Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural understanding is promoted effectively through assemblies and celebrations of other faiths. In the pupil survey, respect and tolerance were identified as being particularly well developed, which is reflected in pupils' behaviour and understanding. As a consequence of all these areas, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The pupil premium funding (which is provided for disadvantaged pupils and those who are looked after) is used effectively to provide a range of support to meet the needs of individuals. Examples of how the funds are spent include visits to colleges, specific catch-up programmes in English and mathematics, and

educational visits. Although there are some variances from year to year, generally these pupils achieve the same as other pupils.

- Pupils' views are sought through a range of methods, including the student council and surveys. Pupils are strongly encouraged to share their opinions. When speaking to inspectors, pupils' conversations focused on what they felt was not as good as it could be. Although leaders were disappointed to hear about this, they were also rightly very proud of the way in which pupils spoke articulately and confidently.
- In response to a request from the headteacher, an adviser from Babcock 4S, which supports schools on behalf of the local authority, has provided useful support in developing leadership across the school and monitored improvements.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors rightly identify that they are more effective than they were before the arrival of the headteacher, because they have a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Having struggled to obtain information in the past, they appreciate the ways in which they are now kept informed about, and involved in, the school. They have a good understanding of their roles and carry them out with rigour and commitment. At all times, they are focused on achieving the best for pupils and the school.
 - Governors' visits are useful in helping them to check how well the school is doing. However, because information about pupils' achievement and development of personal skills is not easy to interpret, governors are not able to hold leaders fully to account.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
 - All staff and governors have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe and reporting concerns. Training is timely and useful in ensuring that new and existing staff are confident about current practice and requirements.
 - The central staff record is detailed and carefully reviewed so that information and systems followed ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. The safeguarding policy is thorough and provides helpful information for staff and parents about the school's specific systems, so there can be no misunderstandings. The school makes good use of support from outside agencies, seeking advice when appropriate, in line with statutory guidance.
 - Leaders take swift action to implement any recommendations which tighten procedures further. This was exemplified well in the changes made between the social care inspection in January and the follow-up visit in June, when the grades improved from good to outstanding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Lessons and activities are planned at different levels to take account of what individual pupils already know. In the most effective lessons, this is done on a pupil-by-pupil basis, so that the pupils in each class all work on similar activities but with a slight adaptation to take account of what will help them learn best.
- Many teachers create a calm and purposeful learning environment. The most effective teachers consider a range of factors when planning lessons, such as seating arrangements and length of time for each section of the lesson. When this happens, the majority of pupils are supported very well so they are able to concentrate on learning. The most able are well supported through this approach and are enabled to fulfil their potential. However, where teachers are not sufficiently skilled at doing this, pupils become inattentive and disruptive.
- Most teachers plan effectively how to meet the individual academic needs of each pupil, through adult support, collaborative working and carefully planned activities. A few teachers do this extremely well and, where this is the case, pupils in those lessons make very good progress. Some teachers are still developing their expertise in this area.
- The support provided by teaching assistants is effective and reflects the high priority leaders have placed on developing their skills. They use their initiative to pre-empt issues and provide good-quality support for pupils' learning needs. This includes identifying when pupils need time out of class or a change of focus. As a result of the good support teaching assistants provide, lessons generally remain calm and purposeful, and pupils remain on task.
- All teachers plan and share the intended learning for each lesson and what they aim to be achieved by the end of the lesson. This helps pupils to be clear why they are doing the activity and, increasingly, they are beginning to reflect on whether they have achieved it.

- Reading skills are taught well. As soon as pupils join the school, a thorough assessment is carried out and, where necessary, pupils are supported to catch up quickly. Once they have the fundamental skills, reading is developed further through English lessons and homework, which are closely linked to writing tasks. Texts are carefully selected to include themes which support pupils' emotional understanding.
- Writing is taught well. For those pupils who are more confident and comfortable, there are opportunities to write at length and for different purposes. There is a strong focus on accurate punctuation, spelling and grammar so that, regardless of how much writing pupils accomplish, the work is generally of good quality.
- The teaching of mathematics is slightly more variable. In the best lessons, work is appropriately challenging for pupils and set at different levels to meet pupils' needs. However, in some lessons, the work is too easy for pupils, so they become bored and less attentive. This was identified by pupils as a cause of frustration for them.
- There is variability in the teaching of other subjects, with some teachers meeting pupils needs better than others. For example, design and technology is taught well. Teachers explore ways of engaging each pupil and the work produced is generally of a very good standard. Many of the boys said that they enjoy these lessons most. However, in more academic subjects, such as science, pupils often carry out the same task at the same level, so some find it too easy or too difficult.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is outstanding. Leaders and staff at all levels play a part in helping pupils to develop high-quality social and communication skills, so that they can thrive in their future lives.
- Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy and are encouraged to do so. They can explain what makes a diet healthy and which foods they should not have too much of and why. They participate in exercise and it is made accessible even for the least sporty. The recently acquired outdoor gym equipment, which the boys tried out and voted on, is an example of the school's excellent work to promote exercise and well-being.
- Well-planned food technology lessons ensure that pupils develop effective cooking skills in readiness for their adult lives. Many of the boys expressed disappointment that they only have these lessons once each week.
- Pupils learn a great deal about keeping themselves safe. In addition to learning about the effects of drugs and alcohol and the dangers of using the internet, the boys have a thorough understanding of health and safety rules and requirements. For example, in a design technology lesson, pupils worked cooperatively, waiting patiently until a member of staff was supervising them to use sanding and cutting equipment. Similarly, in a food technology lesson, pupils were adamant that they needed to wash their knives after cutting chicken; one pupil explained why, using the phrase 'cross-contamination'.
- Lunchtime is very well structured to further develop the boys' communication and social skills and independence. They are provided with tasty and nutritious lunches, which they were involved in selecting. The boys serve themselves and then sit in pre-arranged places at small tables, with an adult. The majority of the older boys demonstrate very good table manners and hold appropriate and interesting conversations. Some of the younger pupils, who joined the school more recently, are in the early stages of developing these skills, so the adult at their table effectively models expectations.
- During the inspection, we held discussions with approximately half the pupils (all of Year 10 and several pupils in Years 7 to 9). Pupils were keen to share their opinions about the school and were very honest about their perspective. They raised concerns about not being challenged enough in some lessons and changes in the school, which they consider they should have been consulted on. Examples include removing the unsafe trim trail and being made to sit on benches during whole-school assemblies, rather than being allowed to sit on the floor. Inspectors took careful account of pupils' feedback and investigated these elements in detail. They found evidence that pupils are consulted on a wide range of decisions, including the décor of the new building, methods for managing lesson time, choices of extra-curricular activities, and a number of others. Inspectors agree that, at some points in lessons, pupils learning needs are not met quite as well as they could be.
- Pupils say that bullying does sometimes occur but that it is stopped by teachers and staff because they take it seriously and manage it very well. Parents and pupils recognise that staff at the school keep pupils safe and take very good care of them.

- Leaders are in the process of making sensible changes so that the site is no longer open and unsecured. The planned changes are positive and, once completed, are likely to maintain the open feel of the site but be more secure for pupils.
- Attendance is monitored rigorously and parents are contacted when attendance falls below the expected figure. The great majority of pupils attend well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils usually conduct themselves in an exemplary way around the school. Their manners and courtesy are of particular note and it was delightful for inspectors to talk to the boys and hear about their learning and opinions.
- Pupils show respect to, and support for, each other. They usually wait patiently for each other to finish speaking so that they can give their opinions. If they feel compelled to interrupt, they do so with phrases such as: 'Excuse me, but I don't agree with you' or 'actually (pause for the other person to stop speaking) I think you are right because...'. This was a notable characteristic of the way in which the boys communicated.
- In lessons, behaviour was slightly more varied, reflecting how well teachers met pupils' learning needs. When bored or frustrated by the lesson, pupils became noisier and less attentive.
- Staff hold useful meetings to review behaviour generally and consider the implications of specific incidents. The recently appointed behaviour support assistants work one-to-one with selected individuals to consider their behaviours and identify effective ways of managing them, so that they learn how to cope with different situations. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of behaviour incidents.
- The percentage of fixed-term exclusions is high, mainly as a result of a few pupils' behaviour. Although it has decreased since 2014, reflecting leaders' actions to reduce this, there is more to be done to prevent pupils having to be removed from school.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress both academically and personally. From the moment the boys join the school, they begin to develop their resilience, independence and communication skills, so that, over time, they develop effective life skills which enable them to achieve well in their future lives. The most able pupils make good progress because teachers usually provide challenging tasks.
- This year, in reading and writing, pupils who achieved below what is typical in Year 6 made much more progress than is usually the case. This reflects the effective individualised support provided for pupils who are behind. However, the progress of other pupils is more variable, with some pupils falling behind. In mathematics, pupils learn steadily and most make expected progress. This reflects the inconsistencies in how precisely some teachers meet pupils' learning needs.
- In 2015, a third of the Year 11 boys achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, reflecting improvements in teaching and leaders' ambition for pupils to do well. The pupils in that year also made significant progress from when they joined the school to when they left. Current pupils are on target to make good progress from their starting points.
- Pupil premium pupils frequently achieve the same standards as other pupils. Where there is variability, this is due to specific pupils' needs. However, the school's work to ensure that these pupils do well has helped to close the gap in attainment across the school.
- For the pupils who require additional learning support, the school meets their needs very well. Pupils' progress is monitored carefully so that if any pupil begins to fall behind, this is identified immediately and appropriate support is put in place. As a result, these pupils do well.
- Many pupils enjoy and achieve well in practical activities, such as food technology, art and design technology. Through effective teaching, pupils are encouraged to seek projects which interest them. The work they produce demonstrates good development of skills.
- Leaders have recently introduced 'mindfulness' into the curriculum, to encourage pupils to become more aware of their thoughts, feelings and environment. The culmination of this for Years 7 to 9 was a performance of a play, which took place during the inspection. Inspectors, along with Year 10 and some staff, observed pupils working cooperatively and independently within a contained and busy space, managing the comings and goings of a high number of pupils, while demonstrating respect for each other and celebrating one another's achievements.

School details

Unique reference number	125458
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection Number	10012630

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Number of boarders on roll	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Teresa Parkinson
Headteacher	Paul Jensen
Telephone number	01883 342281
Website	www.sunnydown.surrey.sch.uk
Email address	office@sunnydown.surrey.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 May 2012

Information about this school

- Sunnydown is an average-sized special school. It is set in large grounds on the outskirts of Caterham village.
- Currently, almost all the boys have an autistic spectrum condition. The school is in the process of being recategorised by Surrey local authority as a school for communication and interaction needs (COIN).
- All the boys who attend have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The percentage of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding (to support disadvantaged pupils and those who are looked after) is in line with other schools nationally.
- There are fewer pupils from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language than is typical.
- Although most pupils who board do so full time, some are part time. There are 35 boarders at present.
- The school has a new classroom block, which includes seven teaching rooms and a library.
- At present, the site is open but there are plans for it to become a secured site. Some work has already been undertaken to achieve this.
- Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school's website is compliant and meets the requirements for the publication of specified information.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed nine lessons, all of which were with senior leaders. Inspectors also made a number of shorter visits to classes. They looked at pupils' work in books and around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, support staff and members of the governing body, including the chair. The inspector also met an adviser from Babcock 4S, who works on behalf of the local authority to support schools.
- Pupils' opinions were gathered through meetings with Year 10 and the school council, as well as informal discussions at breaktime and pupils' responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views through the school's own questionnaire and through the 31 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. The same number of staff responded to the Ofsted staff survey, and their comments and feedback were considered.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school documentation, including the school's information on pupils' progress, the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings and documents related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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